

Translation

Appln. No.: PCT/EP2004/011304
Attorney Docket No.: 14603-022US1
Client Ref.: P2003,0796

Title: Radiation-detecting optoelectronic component.

Specification:

5 The invention relates to an optoelectronic component according to the preamble of Claim 1; a method of fabricating such a component; and use of a zone plate in such a component.

The sensitivity of radiation-detecting semiconductor components 10 can be improved by focusing the radiation to be detected in the light-sensitive zones. E.g., US 6,221,687 and US 6,362,498 disclose image sensors which contain integrated arrays of microlenses which serve to focus the received radiation on a photodiode. In the image sensors disclosed in those documents, color filters are employed to 15 achieve sensitivity to particular wavelengths or colors. A similar component is disclosed in US 2002/0197763 A1.

Other embodiments of color-sensitive radiation-detecting semiconductor components are disclosed in US 5,965,875 and US 20 2003/0038296 A1. In these components, the semiconductor bodies contain a plurality of radiation-sensitive p-n transitions which are disposed mutually vertically. The color sensitivity results from the fact that short-wave photons are preferentially absorbed in the upper zones of the semiconductor body, due to stronger absorption in

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the semiconductor, and photons with longer wavelength are preferentially absorbed in the deeper lying zones of the semiconductor body.

5 In the above-described radiation-detecting components, the focusing of the radiation is accomplished with refractive optical elements, which elements are substantially larger than the wavelength of the radiation.

10 For focusing and/or deflection of light, diffractive elements are known which are based on the principle of diffraction and which have structures of the order of magnitude of the light wavelength(s). An example of such a diffractive focusing element is a zone plate. Zone plates are used in particular in the area of 15 technology of x-ray radiation, for focusing of radiation, where the use of lenses is impracticable because of the small differences in the index of refraction between different materials, and because of the high absorption. An example of such a use is an x-ray microscope disclosed in DE 364257 A1 [sic].

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Zone plates are comprised of structures of concentric rings, with the widths of the rings decreasing with progression in the inward direction. In dimensioning of such zone plates, a distinction must be made between utilization of diffraction in the

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near-field region (Fresnel diffraction) and utilization of diffraction in the far-field region (Fraunhofer diffraction).

The engineering design and dimensioning of Fresnel zone plates
5 is known from, e.g., Hecht, E., 1989, "Optik" (in English, "Optics"), published by Addison-Wesley. Further, a distinction is made between amplitude zone plates and phase zone plates. In amplitude zone plates the radiation of each second Fresnel zone is shielded by an absorbent material, whereas in a phase zone plate a
10 path difference (difference in the path of the radiation) is produced between two neighboring zones in that the materials of the zones differ in index of refraction and/or thickness. With both types of zone plates, beneficial ("constructive") interference occurs at the focal loci, the positions of which loci depend on the
15 wavelength of the incident radiation.

An object (underlying problem) of the present invention is to devise an improved radiation-detecting optoelectronic component which is distinguished by improved sensitivity and the possibility
20 of wavelength-selective radiation detection. Further, it is an object of the invention to devise a fabrication process for such an optoelectronic component.

These objects are achieved according to the invention by an

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optoelectronic component according to Claim 1, a method according to Claim 16, and an application according to Claim 17. Advantageous embodiments and refinements of the invention are set forth in the dependent claims.

5

In an optoelectronic component with a semiconductor chip which chip has at least one radiation-sensitive zone for detection of electromagnetic radiation, and with an optical element for focusing the electromagnetic radiation in the radiation-sensitive zone(s),
10 the optical element is a diffractive optical element.

An advantage of use of a diffractive element to focus the electromagnetic radiation in the radiation-sensitive zones is that the structures of the diffractive elements which are of the order of magnitude of the wavelength of the electromagnetic radiation can be produced by a photolithographic process of a type which is customary in the fabrication of semiconductor chips. In particular, metallic and/or dielectric layers which are already present in integrated circuits, e.g. in CMOS technology, can be utilized for fabricating
20 the diffractive element.

In comparison to refractive optical elements, it is particularly advantageous that a diffractive optical element can be produced as a flat structure in the plane of the semiconductor chip.

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Consequently, for example, it is unnecessary to employ the technically relatively expensive method of manufacturing convex structures in the direction of the incident radiation, which convex structures extend transversely and/or at an angle to the plane of 5 the semiconductor chip, as is necessary when microlenses are employed.

The radiation to be detected may have a wavelength of, e.g., between c. 100 nm (in the ultraviolet spectral region) and 10 c. 5 micron (in the infrared spectral region). In particular the radiation to be detected may comprise light in the visible spectral range of c. 400-800 nm.

The distance between the diffractive element and a radiation-sensitive zone of the semiconductor chip is preferably less than 15 20 micron.

The diffractive element may be, in particular, a zone plate. For the Fresnel number F of the zone plate, preferably the following 20 applies:

$$F = \frac{D^2}{\lambda R} > 1,$$

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where D is the diameter of the zone plate, and

R is the distance between the zone plate and the radiation-sensitive zone in which zone the radiation with wavelength λ is detected. The radiation-sensitive zone is in the near-field region 5 of the zone plate, thus where the zone plate acts as a Fresnel zone plate.

The semiconductor chip may have a single radiation-sensitive zone or a plurality of radiation-sensitive zones. It is 10 particularly advantageous if the chromatic aberration of a zone plate is exploited so as to achieve color-sensitivity of the radiation-detecting component. Preferably, for this purpose a plurality of radiation-sensitive zones are disposed in succession with progression in the incidence direction of the light, with the 15 radiation-sensitive zones for shorter wavelengths being disposed behind (downstream of) the radiation-sensitive zones for longer wavelengths. Thus the zone plate provides simultaneously both focusing of the radiation and wavelength selectivity. E.g., one can provide three radiation-sensitive zones which are disposed in 20 respective focal planes for the respective primary colors (red, green, blue).

The zone plate may be, e.g., an amplitude zone plate, wherein the zones are alternately comprised of a transparent material and an

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absorbing material. The absorbing material is, e.g., a metal.

Preferably the zone plate is a binary phase zone plate, wherein alternate zones are each comprised of one of two respective 5 transparent materials. E.g., these materials may comprise a silicon oxide or a silicon nitride. Because with a phase zone plate, in contrast to the situation with an amplitude zone plate, one does not have half of the zones shielded by absorption, with a phase zone plate the amplitude of the radiation at the focal loci is c. 2 times 10 greater than the amplitude at the focal loci of an amplitude zone plate; and thus the intensity is c. 4 times greater.

The invention will be described in more detail hereinbelow with reference to exemplary embodiments, in connection with Figs. 1 15 and 2.

Fig. 1 is a schematic cross section though an exemplary embodiment of an inventive optoelectronic component; and

20 Fig. 2 is a schematic view of an exemplary embodiment of a zone plate.

In the Figures, identical or similar or similarly functioning elements bear like reference numerals.

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The radiation-detecting semiconductor chip 2 (Fig. 1) has n-doped regions (4, 6) and p-doped regions (3,5) which are formed in the basic material, which material is, e.g., silicon. The 5 transition regions between the p-doped and n-doped regions function as radiation-sensitive zones (7, 8, 9). Electrical contacting and switching of the semiconductor element can be accomplished, e.g., in a (flat) contacting region 19, by metallic track conductors 16.

10

Electromagnetic radiation 17 incident on the semiconductor chip 2 is focused in the radiation-sensitive zones (7, 8, 9), by means of a zone plate 1. This focusing increases the sensitivity of the component and also achieves color-dependent sensitivity as a result 15 of the chromatic aberration properties of the zone plate. In contrast to a lens, with the zone plate the focal length decreases with increasing wavelength. Thus one can provide wavelength-selective radiation detection, if one disposes a plurality of radiation-sensitive zones (7, 8, 9) in succession with progression 20 in the incidence direction of the light 17, with the radiation-sensitive zones for shorter wavelengths being disposed behind (downstream of) the radiation-sensitive zones for longer wavelengths.

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For example, the semiconductor chip 2 has a radiation-sensitive zone 7 in focal plane 11, for red light; and disposed behind this in the direction of the incident light 17 a second radiation-sensitive zone 8 in focal plane 12, for green light; and disposed behind this 5 a third radiation-sensitive zone 9 in focal plane 13, for blue light. Thus in this example a radiation detector for the three primary colors is thus realized. Other numbers of radiation-detecting zones, and other choices of wavelength ranges to be detected, are possible within the scope of the invention.

10

Preferably the zone plate 1 is an integral component of the semiconductor chip 2. E.g., inside the semiconductor chip, above the contacting region 19 in which region the metallic track conductors 16 are formed, a dielectric layer 18 is disposed over 15 which a metallic or dielectric layer is applied in which the structure of the zone plate 1 is formed by photolithographic structuring. The zone plate 1 has a structure of concentric rings consisting of alternating regions (14, 15) comprised of different materials. The regions (14, 15) may be formed from materials with 20 different indices of refraction

(n_1, n_2) , or respectively an absorbent and a transparent material.

The zone plate may be covered, e.g. by a transparent layer 21, which serves in particular to protect the zone plate; alternatively, the zone plate may be formed on the surface of the semiconductor chip 2.

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The layers of which the contacting region 19 and the zone plate 1 are comprised, and the dielectric layer 18 between said layers, are advantageously parts of the layer structure of an integrated 5 circuit. Because integrated circuits comprise a sequence of layers comprised of metallic and dielectric layers, the zone plate 1 may advantageously be produced in (or on) one of the layers already present, using a process of a type which is customarily employed, e.g. photolithography. This will advantageously reduce the 10 fabrication cost.

Another advantage of integration of the zone plate 1 into the semiconductor chip 2 is that, in comparison to installation of a separately fabricated zone plate, no additional expense for 15 adjustment is incurred. In particular, as a result of the integrated construction of the zone plate 1, the zone plate 1 cannot fall out of adjustment; whereas if the zone plate 1 were not so integrated it would be possible for the focal planes (11, 12, 13) to be shifted with respect to the radiation-sensitive zones (7, 8, 9).

20

Fig. 2 shows a schematic depiction of a Fresnel zone plate 1 containing 7 zones, designed for a focal length of 3 micron with a wavelength of 550 nanometer (nm). In this example, the diameter of the zone plate 1 is $D = 12.32$ micron and the width of the outermost

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ring zone is 307 nm.

The zone plate 1 can be either an "amplitude zone plate" or a "phase zone plate". An amplitude zone plate is comprised of 5 alternate light-impermeable ring-shaped zones 14 and light-permeable ring-shaped zones 15. The light-impermeable ring-shaped zones 14 contain, e.g., a metal, and the light-permeable ring-shaped zones 15 contain, e.g., a dielectric; alternately, the light-permeable zones 15 may be free of material.

10

If the zone plate 1 is a phase zone plate, it is comprised of ring-shaped zones 14 comprised of a material with an index of refraction n_1 and neighboring ring-shaped zones 15 comprised of a material with an index of refraction n_2 , both of which are light-15 permeable.

The two light-permeable materials may be, e.g., a silicon oxide and a silicon nitride. These materials have the advantage that they are customarily present in the structures of integrated circuits; 20 thus it is relatively easy to produce the zone plate as an integrated part of the fabrication of an integrated circuit.

Examples of indices of refraction of these materials are:

for wavelength $\lambda = 550$ nm:

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$$n_{\text{SiO}_2} = 1.46, \quad \text{and} \quad n_{\text{Si}_3\text{N}_4} = 2.05.$$

In order to provide a difference in path length of one wavelength
5 lambda, between the ring-shaped zones (14, 15) comprised of these
materials, the thickness d of the zone plate 1 must be:

$$d = \frac{\lambda}{n_{\text{Si}_3\text{N}_4} - n_{\text{SiO}_2}} = 932 \text{ nm}$$

10

Such a layer thickness is in a range of layer thicknesses which are
common in semiconductor device fabrication. Under the assumption
that an amplitude zone plate will absorb approximately half of the
15 incident radiation, the intensity at the focal locus of a phase zone
plate will advantageously be approximately 4 times greater than with
an amplitude zone plate.

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Table 1:

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λ_0 (nm)	D (μm)	l_{\min} (nm)	f (μm) $\lambda=850\text{nm}$	f (μm) $\lambda=650\text{nm}$	f (μm) $\lambda=550\text{nm}$	f (μm) $\lambda=450\text{nm}$	f (μm) $\lambda=300\text{nm}$
850	17,61	550	7	9,27	11,01	13,51	20,36
650	14,98	451	5,62	7	9,33	10,23	15,44
550	13,57	401	4,41	5,88	7	8,61	13,01
450	12,09	350	3,55	4,76	5,68	7	10,59
300	10,59	297	2,28	3,10	3,72	4,60	7

In Table 1, advantageously the diameter D and the minimum structure size l_{\min} of the outer ring-shaped zone are given for zone plates which have a given focal length, e.g. $f_0 = 7$ micron, for a given basic wavelength λ_0 . The values of the diameter D and minimum structure size l_{\min} are applicable to zone plates with 5 zones. As a result of chromatic aberrations, the focal lengths vary; focal lengths for various wavelengths in the range $\lambda = 300$ nm to $\lambda = 850$ nm are given, for the various zone plates.

The focal length f of a zone plate which has focal length f_0 at the basic wavelength λ_0 is as follows at wavelength λ :

$$f = \frac{\lambda}{4} + \frac{4f_0\lambda_0 + \lambda_0^2}{4\lambda}$$

For wavelengths smaller than the basic wavelength λ_0 the focal length of the zone plate increases, whereas for wavelengths greater than said basic wavelength the focal length of the zone plate decreases. For a given focal length f_0 , the minimum structure size l_{\min} of the zone plate decreases with decreasing basic wavelength λ_0 . As indicated in the Table, e.g., for $\lambda_0 = 850$ nm l_{\min} is 550 nm, and for $10 \lambda_0 = 300$ nm l_{\min} is 297 nm.

Structures of these sizes can be produced with photolithography. E.g., first a photoresist layer is applied to a throughgoing metal layer, and a mask is projected over the photoresist layer, which mask contains the structure of the zone plate. Preferably the mask formed on the photoresist is in substantially reduced (scaled down) form [sic], in order to avoid the mask itself operating as a zone plate which serves to focus the light employed for exposing the photoresist. The photoresist is then developed, wherewith, e.g., the photoresist is dissolved away at the locations which are exposed; and subsequently the ring structure is etched at the locations which are not covered by the photoresist. The etching process may be, e.g., an anisotropic

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etching process. The intermediate spaces between the ring-shaped zones are then selectively filled with the dielectric or remain free.

5 In the case of a "phase zone plate", the zone plate structure is etched into a first dielectric and is then filled with a second dielectric. In the case of a zone plate on the surface of a semiconductor chip, the intermediate spaces may also be left free after the etching process. Preferably, the surface is then
10 planarized, e.g. by chemical and mechanical polishing (CMP).

The description of the invention with reference to exemplary embodiments obviously should not be understood to constitute limitation of the scope of the invention to such embodiments.
15 Rather, the invention encompasses the disclosed features individually and in any combination, even if the combinations are not set forth explicitly in the claims.